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PP RUEHDBU RUEHFL RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHNP RUEHROV RUEHSR  
DE RUEHLJ #0124 1141547  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
P 241547Z APR 09  
FM AMEMBASSY LJUBLJANA  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7283  
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE  
RHMFIUU/USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE  
RUEKJCS/JCS WASHDC  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L LJUBLJANA 000124

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/23/2019  
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SUBJECT: SLOVENIA: CHOD'S OUSTER FAVORS REFORM, TIES WITH  
U.S.

Classified By: CDA Brad Freden, reasons 1.4(b,d)

¶1. (U) The Government of Slovenia announced on April 23 that Major General Alojz Steiner will become the new Chief of the General Staff (CHOD) on May 1, replacing Lieutenant General Albin Gutman. Brigadier General Branimir Furlan will become the deputy CHOD. Defense Minister Ljubica Jelusic told press that Gutman will move to the Directorate for Defense Policy in the Ministry of Defense and will retire in 2010. Commentators noted that Jelusic replaced Gutman because he was too hesitant about defense transformation and modernization. Both Steiner and Furlan have studied in the U.S., Steiner at the Industrial College of the Armed Forces at National Defense University in 2004-2005 and Furlan at the Army War College in 2000-2001.

¶2. (C) Comment: This is a welcome change, predicted months ago by State Secretary Uros Krek in a January meeting with CDA. This change strengthens Jelusic's hand in guiding Slovenia's strategic review of its military deployments and opens the door to greater cooperation with the U.S. on many levels. Though some press reports have claimed his ouster stems from his approval of the controversial Patria 8x8 vehicle procurement, Jelusic's decision likely stems more from her desire for a western-educated and forward-looking CHOD. Gutman represented a generation that leaned toward Russia and he was the only member of the general staff who did not speak English. In contrast, the SAF's new leadership looks to the U.S. as its model. Gutman's removal will also bring changes in SAF's middle ranks, as many long-serving officers who owe their allegiance and positions to ties with Gutman will also lose influence. Many newer SAF officers have studied under Jelusic at the university level and have studied or trained with American counterparts. We expect their views to hold more sway as Slovenia pursues its defense transformation.

FREDEN